

# LOGS OF WAR

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TIMBER SECTOR, ARMS  
TRAFFICKING AND THE DESTRUCTION OF THE FORESTS IN LIBERIA



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# AN EMBARGO ON LIBERIAN TIMBER IS VITAL

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# INDEX

ACRONYMS	4
SUMMARY	5
LIBERIA: THE LAST REMAINING FORESTS OF WEST AFRICA	7
TIMBER PRODUCTION IN LIBERIA DURING 1999	9
FOREST MANAGEMENT IN THE HANDS OF THE 'WAR LORDS'	10
WHO BENEFITS FROM TIMBER EXPLOITATION IN LIBERIA?	12
FOREST INDUSTRY AND REGIONAL INSECURITY	14
SPANISH IMPORTS OF LIBERIAN TIMBER	16
THE PROBLEMS INVOLVING SPANISH CAPITAL IN THE LIBERIAN TIMBER SECTOR	17
FORUM LIBERIA AND ARMS TRAFFICKING	20
CONCLUSIONS	22
ANNEXE	23

# ACRONYMS

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AEIM	Spanish Association of Timber Importers (Asociación Española de Importadores de Madera).
AGTP/SAMFU	The Agenda for Global Trade Projects/SAMFU (Liberian NGO).
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ETTE	Exotic and Tropical Timber Enterprises (owned by L. Minin, implicated in arms trafficking)
FDA	Forestry Development Authority
LAC	Liberian Agricultural Company.
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia (armed faction of Charles Taylor)
OTC	Oriental Timber Company (forestry company implicated in arms traffic)
RUF	Revolutionary United Front (guerrilla movement in Sierra Leone).
SLC	Spanish Liberia Dev. Co. (company with forestry concessions in Liberia using Spanish capital).
USB	Union of Swiss Banks

## SUMMARY

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Several decades of hostilities in West Africa have greatly impeded regional development and prevented the alarming levels of chronic poverty from being reduced.

In 1992, the United Nations requested the enforcement of an arms embargo on the area. In 1998 a moratorium which affected the importation, exportation and manufacture of light weapons by 16 member countries of the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) was put into effect.

This moratorium, however, has not been complied with. It has been reported that trafficking in diamonds and other resources has been used to supply funds to the 'warlords'. There is also a wealth of information which would indicate that the logging companies in Liberia play an important role in the illicit trade of arms, as well as in the destabilisation and insecurity of the region.

The United Nations Security Council commissioned a panel of experts to investigate the non-compliance of the arms embargo and its findings were made known last December. The panel of expert investigators found evidence to prove that some timber companies are directly implicated in the traffic of arms. The Spanish company, **Forum Africa/Forum Liberia**, is among those countries listed in the report.

As a result, among the many recommendations made by the UN Security Council's panel of experts is the proposed international embargo on the importation of timber from Liberia.

The Ukrainian businessman, Leonid Minin, was arrested in Italy last year. He is the owner of a timber company and is closely linked to the political circles in Liberia. He is also said to be the most important arms trafficker in Africa. Discovered among the documents seized from Leonid Minin were the names of Spanish businessmen linked to **Forum Africa**.

In 1999, Liberian legislation conferred absolute power on its president, Charles Taylor. According to the new Strategic Commodities Act of Liberia, the exploitation, commercialisation and exportation of all natural resources (minerals, diamonds, gas, timber, etc.) depend solely on President's approval. Therefore, this, and the usurpation of legislative power, makes the current president of the Republic of Liberia the sole beneficiary of any revenue obtained, with a total contempt for the economic and social wellbeing of his country.

In 1998, Spain imported timber from Liberia for a total of 208.5 million pesetas. All the current figures indicate that imports from this African country increased in 1999 and 2000.

In accordance with the recommendations of the UN Security Council's panel of experts, and in view of the evidence which has come to light, Greenpeace is requesting both a temporary embargo on the imports of timber from Liberia and the blacklisting of those companies using Spanish capital in Liberia.

# LIBERIA: THE LAST REMAINING FORESTS OF WEST AFRICA

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Liberia has a total area of 111.369 km<sup>2</sup> (slightly larger than the Spanish region of Castile and Leon), a population of 2.73 million inhabitants and a population density of 25.54 inhabitants/sq. km

After one and a half centuries as a sovereign state, the internal conflicts between rival factions for the control of its resources have plunged the country into ruin and deprivation, making it one of the poorest countries on the planet. Some of its natural resources, diamonds in particular, are instrumental in the political instability of Liberia.

As a result of the instability and internal conflicts, Liberia is the only country within the region that has considerable forest cover. The majority of West African nations (Ivory Coast, Ghana and Nigeria) have destroyed their extensive rainforests which extended from the coast to the interior of their countries.

In 1990 it was estimated that approximately only 12% of these rainforests remained.<sup>1</sup> In 1997 this figure had fallen to 10%.<sup>2</sup> During the period 1990-1995 this region depleted 2.5 million hectares. The annual rates of deforestation in West Africa are among the highest in the world, although the speed of this phenomenon has been interrupted<sup>3</sup>, principally due to political instability and the hostilities, which have prevented large-scale forestry operations from being undertaken.

In spite of this, the last remaining extensive areas of thick tropical forest in West Africa are to be found in Liberia. In 1995 these areas measured some 4.5 million hectares<sup>4</sup> and were divided into two large blocks. Lofa and Bomi in the North-east and Rivercess, Grand Bassa, Sinoe, Grand Gedeh, Maryland, Nimba and Grand Kru in the South-east<sup>5</sup>. Between 1990 and 1995, some 134,000 hectares of forest were destroyed.

These extensive tropical forests are home to species in need of protection either because they are in danger of extinction or because they are endemic to that particular area.

In the forests of Liberia you can find exceptionally rare zoological specimens such as the Liberian Mongoose (*Liberictis kuhni*) and the endemic Pygmy Hippopotamus (*Cheropsis liberensis*).

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<sup>1</sup> FAO, *Situation of World Forests* 1999.

<sup>2</sup> World Resources Institute (WRI), 1997. *"The last forest frontiers. Ecosystems and Economies at the limit"*

<sup>3</sup> According to FAO, since the 80's the rates of deforestation have gone from 2.1% to 1%.

<sup>4</sup> WRI, 1998-1999.

The religious and traditional beliefs of the native population have enabled some of these forests, which were not previously protected, to be designated as forest reserves or national parks.

The protection of the flora and fauna of this area has been identified as a global priority, as highlighted during the meeting organised by the NGO *Conservation International* in 1999<sup>6</sup>.

In early April 2000, the Liberian Minister of Agriculture, Roland Massaquoi, stated that *“it is evident that most of the country's natural rainforests have been depleted without reforestation. If Liberians are not careful about the effective utilisation of the forest reserves, the nation would face drought in the next 15 years”* and he criticised the way in which logging companies were operating.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Agenda for Global Trade Project (AGTP/SAMFU).

<sup>6</sup> West African Priority-Setting Exercise. Ghana, December 1999

<sup>7</sup> *Liberia: the silent destruction of its forests*. Bulletin of the World Forest Movement. January 2000.



# TIMBER PRODUCTION IN LIBERIA DURING 1999

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According to data compiled by the Liberian Government <sup>8</sup>, the volume of logs exported to Western European countries in 1999 was 82%, followed by Asia (15.6%), and other African countries (2.4%). The main importers of Liberian timber are as follows: France (37.07%), Italy (19.17%) Turkey (15.07%), China (7.77%) and Indonesia (6.31%).

In 1999, **Spain** ranked sixth with imports of 6,266 m<sup>3</sup> (3.30% of total exports).

Total timber exports in 1999 were 189,940 m<sup>3</sup> amounting to 21,370,491 US dollars, an increase of 135.5% over 1998. Exports of sawn lumber to Europe are minimal and only amount to 299.4 m<sup>3</sup>.

Six species account for 72.79% of exports:

<u>WOOD</u>	<u>PERCENTAGE</u>
Niangon	24.65%
Tetra	14.48%
Abura	13.79%
Ekki	6.91%
Framire	6.89%
Iroko	6.07%

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<sup>8</sup> Forestry Development Authority. Liberia. Annual Report, 1999.

# FOREST MANAGEMENT IN THE HANDS OF THE 'WAR LORDS'

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**D**ue to the wars which ravaged the country during the 90s, the exploitation of the Liberian forests was considerably less than carried out by its neighbouring countries. However, because of the victory of Charles Taylor, chief 'warlord' and current president, and the relative size of its tropical forests, international industries and their commercial agents have begun to set their sights on this small African country.

During the 90s Liberia did not enjoy a structured economic system. Its economy was based on the exploitation of its resources, criminal gangs and smuggling from the mines and timber operations. The 'warlords' have fomented conflict not only for their own personal benefit, but also to gain control over and to exploit the mineral and timber resources of the local inhabitants in the strife-torn areas<sup>9</sup>.

During the early 90s, income from the export of minerals (gold, diamonds, iron) and timber constituted the principal source of revenue for the 'warlords'<sup>10</sup>.

France supplied arms to the NPFL (Charles Taylor's armed faction) in exchange for timber. Liberia receives large supplies of arms from Europe and the Middle East. In December 1993, the Austrian weekly, *Profil* stated that the Frenchman, Werner Mehler, supplied Charles Taylor with large quantities of arms and munitions from Rumania. Lebanese companies have also been named as purchasers of mineral and forestry resources in exchange for credits and access to equipment. The government of the Ivory Coast also helped the NPFL in exchange for concessions in mineral and timber exploitations.<sup>11</sup>

The value of timber exports from areas controlled by armed factions between 1990 and 1994 is estimated at 53 million dollars.<sup>12</sup>

At the end of the war and after the 1997 elections in Liberia the forestry sector made a slow recovery, as there was no sustained level of timber exports.<sup>13</sup> However, in view of the prohibition on the export of roundwood (logs) imposed on several Central and West African countries, all the available information indicates that both the logging industry

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<sup>9</sup> Ortiz Lledó, C. 1996. The disintegration of Liberia. Observatory of Conflict s. Investigation Centre for Peace

<sup>10</sup> Ortiz Lledó, C., 1996.

<sup>11</sup> Ortiz Lledó, C., 1996.

<sup>12</sup> Regional Surveys of the World, 1997.

<sup>13</sup> Tropical Timbers, January 2000.

and international capital consider Liberia to be a country which will enable them to continue depleting the forests<sup>14</sup>.

Having said this, however, the international import sector realises that the Liberian Government has a limited ability to manage, control and monitor its forestry activities.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Tropical Timbers, October 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Tropical Timbers, January 2000.

# WHO BENEFITS FROM TIMBER EXPLOITATION IN LIBERIA?

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The FDA (*Forestry Development Authority*) was formed in 1976 and is a government body assigned to manage forest resources in Liberia. Before 1999, anyone, with the exception of the Liberian President, Vice-president and any government official, could utilise the forestry resources. Also excluded were members of the Senate and Parliament, members of the Judiciary, and officers of the Armed Forces and Police Service.<sup>16</sup>

Two laws regarding Liberian forestry resources were passed in 1999, one of which, the new National Forestry Act, reconfirmed the mandate given to the FDA in 1976, making it responsible for the monitoring of forestry operations in order not only to ensure a sustainable supply of timber, but also to safeguard methods of extraction so as to guarantee the sustainable development of its forestry resources.

The other controversial and highly criticised law gave the President of Liberia exclusive control over the country's natural resources. Known as the Strategic Commodities Act, it authorises specific people and entities to extract, exploit, sell or export the natural and mineral resources of Liberia without having to pay any kind of State tax or having to pass through Customs controls, to the economic and social detriment of the nation.

The Strategic Commodities Act empowered the President of Liberia to, at any time, declare and designate any natural resources of Liberia, including all forestry resources. Other resources such as gold, diamonds, gas, minerals, metal or stones which had been discovered, or were yet to be discovered, and which had a commercial value and could be marketed at both national and international level, were also considered strategic commodities.<sup>17</sup>

The President was also granted the power to execute and negotiate all commercial contracts or agreements with any foreign or domestic investor for the exploitation of any of the strategic commodities of the Republic of Liberia, upon his sole signature.<sup>18</sup>

Charles Taylor not only controls all the natural resources of Liberia and their economic benefits but also uses the revenue to provide support for the RUF in Sierra Leone.

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<sup>16</sup> An Act Adopting a New National Forestry Law, 1999

<sup>17</sup> Strategic Commodities Act, 1999

As well as the known link between the international diamond trade ('diamonds of war') and the funding of the guerrilla armies in the neighbouring country, international NGO's have confirmed that President Charles Taylor also uses the revenue obtained from the forestry operations to fund the RUF militia groups in Sierra Leone.<sup>19</sup>

The data on export figures in the Liberian Forestry Authority's annual report does not coincide with information received from independent sources.<sup>20</sup> The revenue obtained from timber exports does not reflect actual logging operations, as a considerable part is exempt from taxes and the economic benefits are not recorded. A very large percentage of this revenue from forestry operations is not reflected in the official accounts of the Republic of Liberia and is used to pay for favours received, or to fund the trafficking of arms and diamonds.

The *Oriental Timber Company* (OTC) is the largest timber company in Liberia and is closely linked to President Charles Taylor. It operates with complete impunity and is not subject to the control of the Liberian forestry authority, the FDA. According to NGO *Global Witness* sources, the OTC provided President Taylor with 5 million dollars in exchange for tax exemption and exclusion from controls and regulations. In the report of UN Security Council's Panel of Experts, this company was named as one of those implicated in corruption and arms trafficking to Sierra Leone. In fact, the roads built by the OTC for their forestry operations have been used to transport weapons to the rebels in Sierra Leone.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Strategic Commodities Act, 1999

<sup>19</sup> Global Witness, January 2001. The Role of Liberia's Logging Industry on National and Regional Insecurity. Briefing to the UN Security Council.

<sup>20</sup> Global Witness, January 2001. The Role of Liberia's Logging Industry on National and Regional Insecurity. Briefing to the UN Security Council.

<sup>21</sup> Report of the Panel of Experts appointed pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1306 (2000), Paragraph 19, in relation to Sierra Leone. December 2000.

# FOREST INDUSTRY AND REGIONAL INSECURITY

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In December 2000 the UN Security Council's Panel of Experts published a report<sup>22</sup> analysing the role of countries, people and companies in the regional insecurity of West Africa, and particularly in the internal conflict in Sierra Leone.

The report states that despite a commercial embargo on arms to Sierra Leone, several countries in the region, including governments and the Liberian logging industry, are implicated in providing weapons in exchange for diamonds and other raw materials.

According to the report, *"the timber industry is involved in a series of illicit activities and a large amount of the revenue is used to fund extra-budgetary activities including the acquisition of weapons"*.

The report also notes that roads built and maintained for timber exploitation are used for weapons movement to Sierra Leone. The trucks employed in the transportation of timber are also used to transport arms. The owners of the timber companies, which are implicated in this trade, have close ties with President Taylor, to whom they give financial support. The report also named some businessmen connected with the timber industry. They are closely linked to the circles of power, and also have access to hangars from where small aircraft used in the traffic of arms to Sierra Leone take off.

The report names the three timber companies directly implicated in this trade: Exotic and Tropical Timber Enterprises (ETTE), Oriental Timber Company (OTC) and **Forum Liberia**<sup>23</sup>.

Consequently, the experts made the following recommendation to the UN Security Council:

*"The principals in Liberia's timber industry are involved in a variety of illicit activities, and large amounts of the proceeds are used to pay for extra-budgetary activities, including the acquisition of weapons. Consideration should be given to placing a temporary embargo on Liberian timber exports, until Liberia demonstrates convincingly that it is no longer involved in the trafficking of arms to, or diamonds from, Sierra Leone"*.

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<sup>22</sup> Report of the Panel of Experts appointed pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1306 (2000), Paragraph 19, in relation to Sierra Leone. December 2000.

<sup>23</sup> Forum Liberia, registered in the Companies Register of Madrid as Forum Africa, has its headquarters in Madrid, in Fernández de los Ríos N° 93. 28015. Tel: 91 5495442; Fax: 91 5491388

And also:

*"In addition, it is recommended that a detailed investigation is carried out into the Liberian timber industry, particularly of the Oriental Timber Company (OTC), to enable the UN Security Council and other members of the global community to gain a comprehensive understanding of the role of this industry in Charles Taylor's presidency and the conflict in Sierra Leone."*

Global Witness<sup>24</sup>, an NGO dedicated to the environment and protection of human rights has recently reminded the UN Security Council of the necessity to place an embargo on exports of Liberian timber as they are implicated in the arms trade to Sierra Leone. This international NGO has published a report<sup>25</sup> in which it describes Liberian timber as *"logs of war"*.

In the report published in 2000<sup>26</sup> by the office of **Greenpeace España**, attention is drawn to the wealth of information linking the timber industry to the causes of poverty, underdevelopment and conflicts in Africa.

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<sup>24</sup> Global Witness, January 2001. The Role of Liberia's Logging Industry on National and Regional Insecurity. Briefing to the UN Security Council.

<sup>25</sup> Global Witness, Press Release, 17<sup>th</sup> January 2001. Global Witness calls on UN Security Council to Embargo Liberian "Logs of War".

<sup>26</sup> Greenpeace, April 2000. Poverty and deforestation in Tropical Africa. Liberia, page 26.

## SPANISH IMPORTS OF LIBERIAN TIMBER

In 1990, Liberia ranked fourth in the volume of tropical wood imported by Spain from Africa (behind Cameroon, Ivory Coast and the Republic of the Congo).

Spanish importers continued to receive tropical wood from Liberia in 1990, 1991 and 1992, years in which the 'warlords' ravaged the country.

### SPANISH IMPORTS OF LIBERIAN TIMBER

THOUSANDS OF CUBIC METRES/MILLIONS OF PESETAS

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999*
Logs	52.9	3.3	8.7	-	-	-	-	-	6.8	3.3
Sawn lumber	4.2	0.75	0.4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Value	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	208.5	73.8

Source: Compiled from data supplied by the Asociación Española de Importadores de Madera (AEIM) (Spanish Association of Timber Importers) 1990-1999. The data for 1990, 1991 and 1992 has been supplied by Customs Authorities, for 1993 by ICEX, and subsequent years by AEIM) (\*) Data January-September.

After pressure by Greenpeace and its allegations regarding the involvement of Spanish importers in the illicit trade of tropical wood, the Spanish Association of Timber Importers (AEIM) ceased to provide annual figures on their imports of timber.

Nevertheless, despite the lack of recent data, all available information appears to indicate that imports of tropical wood from Liberia have increased and will continue to do so during the coming years.



# SPANISH CAPITAL`S PROBLEMS IN THE LIBERIAN TIMBER SECTOR

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According to Liberian Government statistics,<sup>27</sup> in 1999 there were at least three companies with forestry concessions whose names linked them to Spanish capital, namely, **Forum Liberia**, **Iberic Forestry Corp.** and **Spanish Liberia Dev. Co. (SLC)**. Of these three companies only **Forum Liberia** has been repeatedly mentioned in documents, NGO reports, and by the media.

The partners of **Forum Liberia** are the Spanish businessmen, Jesús Martín Fernández de Velasco, José María Muñoz Suárez, José Fernández Prada (ex president of Forum Filatélico) and Alberto Morales. The last two are also partners of **Forum Africa, S.A.**, founded in 1998 and with headquarters in Madrid. **Forum Liberia** has frequently appeared in various publications under different names, such as **Forum-Africa-Liberia**<sup>28</sup> or **Forum Africa Limited**<sup>29</sup>.

The timber company, **Forum Liberia**, was founded in 1999 and has its central office in Monrovia (Liberia). In 1999 it had a timber production of 5,364 m<sup>3</sup>, constituting 1.6% of the nation's total. It exported 3,177 m<sup>3</sup> of timber and was ranked 14<sup>th</sup> in the list of Liberian timber export companies.

After several failed attempts with other companies, and before **Forum Liberia** was founded, Jesús Martín Fernández Velasco contacted Forum Africa and offered them the opportunity to join the timber trade in Liberia by exploiting the concessions of the *Liberian Agricultural Company* (LAC). It was later suggested in a report by the Liberian NGO, *The Agenda for Global Trade Projects/SAMFU*<sup>30</sup> (AGTP/SAMFU) that the **Spanish Liberian Company (SLC)** changed its name to **Forum Africa Liberia** because its negotiations with the Liberian Agricultural Company to operate in their concessions were unsuccessful. SLC representatives began to renegotiate with LAC after the company was registered under the name of **Forum Africa Liberia**. An agreement was reached with the Liberian Government for **Forum Africa Liberia** to exploit primary forests<sup>31</sup> in concessions belonging to LAC.

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<sup>27</sup> Forestry Development Authority. *Liberia. Annual Report, 1999*.

<sup>28</sup> The Daily Times Newspaper, Monday June 12, 2000.

<sup>29</sup> News Bulletin of the Agenda for Global Trade Project/SAMFU, February 2000.

<sup>30</sup> The Agenda for Global Trade Project (a SAMFU Foundation Initiative). A review of the IFC Loan to LAC and its implications for Liberia's Bio-diversity.

<sup>31</sup> Primary forests are extensive natural forests which are not industrially exploited.

According to sources of information in the Madrid offices of **Forum Africa**<sup>32</sup>, the Liberian Government received forestry exploitation taxes from both LAC and **Forum Liberia**. As a result, LAC and **Forum Africa** became engaged in a legal battle over the felling rights to 85,800 hectares of forest. In a communiqué to the Forestry Development Authority regarding this matter, the Attorney General of Liberia took the view that the Liberian Government had the right to concede the under-utilised areas of LAC's concessions to other companies for exploitation<sup>33</sup>, therefore judging in favour of **Forum Liberia**.

The conflict was taken up by the Liberian media. According to *The Daily Times Newspaper*<sup>34</sup>, **Forum Africa** was accused by LAC of encroachment in its concessions in the *Grand Bassa* region. LAC accused **Forum Africa** of illegally exploiting outside its concessions, and declared that it had discovered stacks of logs a few kilometres outside its area of operations. According to the newspaper, **Forum Africa** is receiving support from a highly placed government official, presumed to be Vice-president Enoch Dogolea.

Field investigations carried out by the NGO AGTP/SAMFU<sup>35</sup> indicated that the *Liberian Agricultural Company* (LAC) and **Forum Africa** have been involved in confrontations with the local people living in the Liberian forests, over the anomalies in the timber exploitation.

According to the same source of information, interviews by the researchers with the local people regarding the dispute over the concession between LAC and **Forum Africa** revealed a general unease about the lack of information on the operations being carried out in their area, the fact that there is no spokesman for the timber company, and that the promises made have not been fulfilled at all. When asked about the legal battle between LAC and **Forum Africa**, the local inhabitants stated that they did not know 'who was who' and that " they all arrive, cut the forest and then leave". When the local inhabitants have requested information regarding the timber operations, they have been told by the workers from these companies to "go and ask the Government".

This same Liberian NGO has declared that during the rainy season in *Rivercess County*, the continuous movement of trucks working for the Oriental Timber Company, **Forum Liberia** and *Rivercess Logging Company* severely damaged the only road into the city of Buchanan and prevented it from being used by other vehicles. In addition, the

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<sup>32</sup> Personal interview with Alberto Morales of Forum Africa.

<sup>33</sup> The News (Newspaper), June 24, 1999.

<sup>34</sup> The Daily Times Newspaper, Monday June 12, 2000.

<sup>35</sup> A Review of the IFC loan to LAC and its implications for Liberia's Bio-diversity. 1999. The Agenda for Global Trade Project (a SAMFU Foundation Initiative). Monrovia, Liberia.

'militias' of **Forum Liberia** and OTC have been periodically exchanging shots over disputes about the concession's borderlines.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> SAMFU Foundation, 2001. Living Dangerously. An Assessment of Multinationals in Liberian Logging Industry.

# FORUM LIBERIA AND ARMS TRAFFICKING

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On the night of 4<sup>th</sup> August 2000, the Ukrainian businessman, **Leonid Minin**, was arrested in Italy for possession of 20 grammes of cocaine together with a cache of diamonds. He was convicted and sentenced to two years' imprisonment to be served in Italy.<sup>37</sup>

**Leonid Minin**, who usually resides in Ibiza, Spain, is president of the Liberian timber company, *Exotic Tropical Timber Enterprises* (ETTE) and a personal friend of Charles Taylor, President of Liberia. According to the report prepared by the UN Security Council<sup>38</sup>, the timber company ETTE is implicated in the traffic of arms to Sierra Leone.

The United Nations consider **Leonid Minin**, leader of the Ukrainian mafia in Europe, to be the most important arms trafficker in the continent of Africa. The experts who drew up the report for the UN Security Council confirm that his private plane has been used to move weapons between the Ukraine and Western Africa.<sup>39</sup>

Among the documents seized from **Leonid Minin** after his arrest, is one dated 24 December 1999 and titled *"Purchase-Sale Agreement for Certain Assets, Equipment and Machinery"*, and in which the name of **José María Muñoz Suárez**, partner in **Forum Liberian Corporation**, appears. This company is controlled by the same Spanish businessmen as **Forum Africa Liberia**, both with headquarters in Monrovia<sup>40</sup>. In November 1999, **Forum Liberia** handed over a cheque drawn on the USB (Union of Swiss Banks) for one and a half million US dollars as the first payment of a 5 million dollar contract with Exotic Tropical for timber concessions and the purchase of machinery<sup>41</sup>. According to other media sources, and in line with the purchasing agreement, Minin sold timber assets to Forum Liberia for two million dollars.<sup>42</sup>

In 1999, **José María Muñoz Suárez**, partner in **Forum Liberia** was made responsible for the marketing of timber extracted in Liberia. Having worked in timber companies in Equatorial Guinea for ten years, he is very well informed of their operations.

Another character involved in this intrigue, is **Jesús Martín Fernández Velasco**, of Valladolid, Spain. Before he joined **Forum Liberia**, Fernández Velasco was partner in a

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<sup>37</sup> El Mundo, 8 February 2001

<sup>38</sup> Report of the Panel of Experts appointed pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1306 (2000), Paragraph 19, in relation to Sierra Leone. December 2000

<sup>39</sup> Report of the Panel of Expert appointed pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 1306(2000), paragraph 19, in relation to Sierra Leone. December 2000.

<sup>40</sup> El Mundo, 14 January 2001

<sup>41</sup> El Mundo, 14 January 2001.

<sup>42</sup>Journal, The Perspective, which published the news on 9 February 2001, states it has a copy of said contract. [Http://www.theperspective.com](http://www.theperspective.com)

security systems company from Alicante, Spain, with Eric Van Offlen (Belgian citizen, friend of the managers of Liberian Agriculture Company) and a former Spanish police superintendent, Gerardo Castaño. According to other sources, this company installed the security system in the home of Charles Taylor.<sup>43</sup>

The president of **Forum Africa** in Spain, **Jesús Fernández Prada**, used to be president of **Forum Filatélico**, a philatelic investment company. Fernández Prada resigned as president of this latter group of companies on 31 January 2001<sup>44</sup>. According to Spanish national press reports<sup>45</sup> Jesús Fernández Prada declared that the only relationship he had with the Ukrainian Minin was a business deal for timber: *"We bought the assets of his company through Forum Liberia (....) We only gave him a promissory note for one and a half million dollars, guaranteed by me"*. Fernández Prada has also admitted to the press that he has visited **Leonid Minin** in Ibiza.

Another Spanish businessman named in this affair is **Fernando Fernández Robleda**, Leonid Minin's partner in Liberia, until his name appeared in the media. As Minin's partner, he was responsible for the purchase and sale of equipment between ETTE and **Forum Liberia**<sup>46</sup>.

**Forum Africa** is a member of the Asociación Española de Importadores de Madera (AEIM) (Spanish Association of Timber Importers). This association has not yet made clear that it is no longer associated with the illicit exploitation of African forests.

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<sup>43</sup> Confidential.

<sup>44</sup> Jesús Fernández Prada's resignation appears that in the Register of this company dated 31 January 2001. Companies Register of Madrid.

<sup>45</sup> El Mundo, 14 January 2001.

<sup>46</sup> El Mundo, 14 January 2001.

## CONCLUSIONS

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It is an undeniable fact that the Liberian timber industry has financed and continues to finance both the regional and national insecurity of Sierra Leone. In order for the peace agreement in Sierra Leone to have any measure of success, all current international endeavours are being focussed on preventing bordering countries, such as Liberia, from providing supplies and logistic support to the militias of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF).

Given the absolute control over revenue from timber exploitation in Liberia, as with the diamond trade, there is increasingly more information which suggests that President Charles Taylor uses a considerable amount of the income obtained from the sale and exportation of timber to provide support to the RUF.

There is also evidence to prove that **Forum Africa** practices bad timber management and that its operations in Liberia are enveloped in conflict. It is also considered to have been proved that the partners of this company, which uses Spanish capital, have dealings with people implicated in the trafficking of arms.

Consequently, **Greenpeace** demands:

**A TOTAL EMBARGO ON TIMBER AND TIMBER PRODUCTS FROM LIBERIA AS WELL AS AN IN-DEPTH INVESTIGATION INTO THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE LIBERIAN TIMBER TRADE AND REGIONAL INSECURITY.**

## ANNEXE

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- Spanish paper *El Mundo*. Sunday, 14 January 2001: El mayor traficante de armas a Africa reside en España. (Africa's biggest arms trafficker lives in Spain) <http://www.elmundo.es/2001/01/14>
- Article UN New Task: Handling Agents of Horrors. (Editorial). The Perspective. 9 February 2001.  
<http://www.theperspective.org/agentsofhorrors.html>